

## 1 CLAIMS

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3 1. A method of filling a flexible-walled container  
4 comprising the steps of:

5 (i) purging substantially all oxygen from the  
6 interior of the container by introducing an  
7 inert gas;

8 (ii) introducing a foodstuff into the  
9 container; and

10 (iii) sealing the container.

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12 2. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the  
13 step of introducing a foodstuff into the container  
14 is preceded by deploying the container from a folded  
15 to an unfolded configuration.

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17 3. A method as claimed in claim 2, wherein the  
18 step of deploying the container from a folded to an  
19 unfolded configuration is achieved by means of gas  
20 inflation.

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22 4. A method as claimed in any of claims 1 to 3,  
23 wherein, if the introduced foodstuff is  
24 substantially entirely solid in state, the step of  
25 purging substantially all oxygen from the interior  
26 of the container is initiated before the step of  
27 introducing the solid foodstuff into the container.

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29 5. A method as claimed in any of claims 1 to 3,  
30 wherein, if the introduced foodstuff is  
31 substantially entirely solid in state, the steps of  
32 purging substantially all oxygen from the interior

1 of the container and introducing the solid foodstuff  
2 into the container are performed concurrently.

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4 6. A method as claimed in any of claims 1 to 3,  
5 wherein, if the introduced foodstuff is  
6 substantially entirely liquid in state, the step of  
7 purging substantially all oxygen from the interior  
8 of the container is initiated after the step of  
9 introducing the liquid foodstuff into the container.

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11 7. A method as claimed in any of claims 1 to 3,  
12 wherein, the step of introducing a foodstuff into  
13 the container involves the introduction of a  
14 substantially solid foodstuff followed by the  
15 introduction of a substantially liquid foodstuff;  
16 and wherein the step of purging substantially all  
17 oxygen from the interior of the container is ceased  
18 after the step of introducing the substantially  
19 solid foodstuff into the container.

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21 8. A method as claimed in claim 4 or 5, wherein  
22 the container is inflated by an inert gas after  
23 introduction of the substantially solid foodstuff.

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25 9. A method as claimed in claims 6 or 7, wherein  
26 the container is inflated by an inert gas after  
27 introduction of the substantially liquid foodstuff.

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29 10. A method as claimed in claims 8 or 9, wherein  
30 the inert gas is introduced into the container by  
31 gas introduction means whilst the flexible wall of

1 the open end of the container is engaged tightly  
2 against the gas introduction means.

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4 11. A method as claimed in claim 10, wherein the  
5 gas introduction means is a nozzle with a  
6 substantially flat opening.

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8 12. A method as claimed in any of claims 8 to 11,  
9 wherein the container is inflated to a desired  
10 volume.

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12 13. A method as claimed in any of claims 8 to 11,  
13 wherein the container is over-inflated beyond a  
14 desired volume.

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16 14. A method as claimed in claim 13, wherein a  
17 selected volume of the inert gas is subsequently  
18 removed from within the container.

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20 15. A method as claimed in claim 14, wherein the  
21 selected volume is removed by mechanical squeezing  
22 of the flexible wall of the container.

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24 16. A method as claimed in any of claims 8 to 15,  
25 wherein the step of sealing the container is  
26 performed whilst the container is at least partially  
27 inflated to thereby retain a selected volume of  
28 inert gas therein.

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30 17. A method as claimed in claim 16, wherein the  
31 container is sealed by means of heat sealing.

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1 18. A method as claimed in claim 16 or 17, wherein  
2 the volume of inert gas remaining within the  
3 container is selected to reduce agglomeration of  
4 discrete pieces of foodstuff.

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6 19. A method as claimed in any preceding claim,  
7 wherein the foodstuff is cereal based.

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9 20. A method as claimed in any preceding claim,  
10 wherein the cereal is selected from the group  
11 consisting of rice, couscous, wild rice, barley,  
12 wheat, oats, rye, millet and maize.

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14 21. A method as claimed in any preceding claim,  
15 wherein the flexible-walled container is a plastics  
16 pouch.

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18 22. A method as claimed in any preceding claim,  
19 wherein the inert gas is selected from the group  
20 consisting of nitrogen, carbon dioxide, helium,  
21 argon, neon and xenon.

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23 23. A method as claimed in any preceding claim,  
24 wherein oxygen gas forms less than 2% of the volume  
25 of gas within the container.

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27 24. A method as claimed in any preceding claim,  
28 wherein oxygen gas forms less than 1% of the volume  
29 of gas within the container.

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31 25. A flexible-walled container filled by the  
32 method of any of claims 1 to 24.